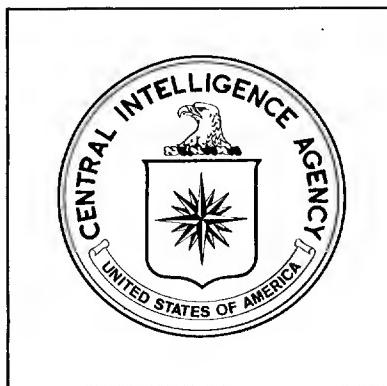


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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

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Syria

A Political Test of Wills

President Asad is apparently embroiled in a political test of wills with some of his opponents in the Syrian Baath Party. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the dispute has brought government work to a virtual halt in all except the key ministries of defense, foreign affairs, and information.

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[REDACTED] Asad still refuses to acknowledge the defeat in the April party elections of two of his lieutenants, Prime Minister Ayyubi and Deputy Defense Minister Jamil. Rather than name a new government, Asad is said to be threatening to call another round of party elections.

Despite the President's refusal to dismiss Ayyubi, many senior Syrian officials reportedly doubt that the Prime Minister can continue to preside effectively over a cabinet that includes several ministers who now outrank him in the party. Ayyubi himself seems convinced of this and has reportedly refused to withdraw his proffered resignation or to exercise many of his duties as prime minister.

Both party and government officials are hopeful that the present uncertainty will be resolved by the time the Baath Party National Congress convenes later this summer or early in the fall. So far, however, Asad has given no indications what he intends to do. Indeed, his inaction seems calculated at least in part to demonstrate his anger at having his authority challenged in this way. If and when Asad does decide to name a replacement for Ayyubi, it is likely to be done in such a way as to leave no doubt as to who is in charge. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM/CONTROLLED DISSEM)

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Mozambique

The New Regime

The political system of the newly-independent Peoples Republic of Mozambique is beginning to take shape. The new government, headed by President Samora Machel, is likely to move slowly in implementing any new programs, however.

The constitution endows the President with virtually absolute political and military powers. He presides over a 15-member council of ministers and deputy ministers.

A popularly-elected Peoples Assembly is to meet twice a year and act as the country's legislative body. Elections for delegates to the assembly will be held after the next party congress of the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, the country's sole political organization. No date for the congress has been set so far.

The Peoples Assembly is likely to be a rubber stamp. Important legislative action will be carried out by a permanent committee of the assembly, which takes charge when the assembly is not in session. The permanent committee is composed of members appointed by the Front and is presided over by the president.

Machel will establish a strongly authoritarian state with an ideology that is nationalist but borrows heavily from Chinese communism. Puritanism and communal endeavor will be stressed. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] China has agreed to provide political and economic advisers to assist the new government to organize rural communes and urban wards. Economically, agricultural development will be given top priority.

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The new government will actively seek foreign support. Front vice-president Marcelino dos Santos, the new minister for development and economic planning, was a major fund-raiser for the Front during the years of the insurgency. His contacts were largely with communist and radical African states.

The new foreign minister is Joaquim Chissano, who served as prime minister of the transitional government prior to independence. During that time, Chissano made a favorable impression on Western diplomats in Lourenco Marques. He is well-traveled, articulate, and pragmatic and apparently exercises a moderating influence on Machel.

The 100,000 whites remaining in Mozambique are watching the new government closely. Whites were visibly shaken by some of Machel's speeches prior to independence when he barnstormed the countryside and dwelt at length on Portuguese atrocities during the insurgency and the indignities heaped on Mozambicans by colonialists.

In an effort to halt the exodus of whites, Machel has named three of them to ministerial posts. The future of the whites in Mozambique is not bright, however. Their properties are likely to be nationalized as soon as the new government gets settled in. Semi-skilled and unskilled white laborers will find their jobs taken by blacks. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM/NO DISSEM ABROAD/CONTROLLED DISSEM)

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Comoro Islands

Unilateral Independence

The Comoro Islands unilaterally declared their independence from France on July 6. The move followed a unanimous vote by the Comorian Chamber of Deputies--six members were absent--aimed at nullifying a recent decision by the French National Assembly providing for the islands' independence later this year under an arrangement that would have allowed one of the four islands to remain a part of France. The administration of President Giscard, which favored maintaining the archipelago's territorial integrity, issued a communique saying it accepted "with equanimity" the Comorian decision.

Comorian national political leaders had immediately denounced the bill passed by the French assembly on June 26. Its provision for an island-by-island vote would have allowed the Mahorais--the inhabitants of the island of Mayotte--to end their association with the rest of the Comoros and make Mayotte a French department. In a referendum last December, 60 percent of the Mahorais voted to retain links with France while voters in the other three islands were voting overwhelmingly in favor of independence. Mayotte culture reflects heavy French and Christian influence; Muslim culture predominates on the other islands. The Mahorais are almost certain to oppose the independence declaration, and may engage in violent demonstrations.

Ahmed Abdallah, the leader of the islands' local government, will become the new chief of state. Abdallah is a member of the conservative Arab aristocracy that dominates Comorian politics. Independence could lead to increased friction between the Arab elite and the largely black population of about 300,000.

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The islands will be heavily dependent on outside aid, which will come mostly from France. The government will also seek assistance from Muslim countries. Libya has shown interest in the islands; several delegations have visited the Comoros, and Abdallah visited Tripoli in March. Saudi Arabia may provide some aid with a view to preventing the islands from falling under radical Arab influence. Iran is also interested in Comorian developments, and may provide limited aid. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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